

**James Madison to James Monroe, June 21, 1786.
Partly in Cipher. Transcription: The Writings of James
Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's
Sons, 1900-1910.**

TO JAMES MONROE. MAD. MSS.

Orange June 21st, 1786.

Dear Sir, —Your favor of the 31st ult. did not come to hand till two days ago. As I expect to see you in a short time, I will suspend the full communication of my ideas on the subject of it till I have that pleasure. I cannot however forbear in the mean time expressing my amazement that a thought should be entertained of¹ *surrendering the Mississippi*, and of *guaranteing the possessions of Spain in America*. In the first place has not Virga., have not Congs themselves, and the Ministers of Congs., by their orders asserted the *right of those who live on the waters of the Mississippi to*

1 Italics for cypher.

use it as the high road given by nature to the sea? This being the case, have Congs any more authority to say that the *Western citizens of Virga.* shall not *pass through the capes of Mississippi* than to say that *her Eastern citizens* shall not *pass through the capes Henry & Charles*. It should be remembered that the United States are not now extricating themselves from *war, a crisis* which often knows no *law but that of necessity*. The measure in *question* would be a *voluntary barter* in time of *profound peace* of the *rights of one part of the empire* to the *interests of another part*. What would *Massachusetts* say to a proposition for *ceding to Britain her right of fishery* as the *price of some stipulations* in *favor of Tobacco*.

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Again can there be a more short-sighted or dishonorable policy than to concur with *Spain* in frustrating the benevolent views of nature to sell the *affections of our ultra-montane brethren* to depreciate the *richest fund we possess* to distrust an ally whom we know to be able to befriend us and to have an interest in doing it against the only nation whose enmity we can dread, and at

the same time to court by the most precious sacrifices the alliance of a nation whose impotency is notorious, who has given no proof of regard for us and the genius of whose Government religion & manners unfit them of all the nations in christendom for a coalition with this country. Can anything too, as you well observe, be more unequal than a stipulation which is to open all our ports to her and some only and those the least valuable of hers to us; and which places the commercial freedom of our ports agst the fettered regulations those in Spain. I always thought the stipulation with france & Holld. of the privileges of the most favoured nation as unequal, and only to be justified by the influence which the treaties could not fail to have on the event of the war. A stipulation putting Spanish subjects on the same footing with our own citizens is carrying the evil still farther without the same pretext for it; and is the more to be dreaded, as by making her the most favored nation it would let in the other nations with whom we are now connected to the same privileges, whenever they may find it their interest to make the same compensation for them whilst we have not a reciprocal right to force them into such an arrangement in case our interest should dictate it. A guaranty is if possible still more objectionable. If it be insidious we plunge ourselves into infamy. If sincere, into obligations the extent of which cannot easily be determined. In either case we get farther into the labyrinth of european politics from which we ought religiously to keep ourselves as free as possible. And what is to be gained by such a rash step? Will any man in his senses pretend that our territory needs such a safeguard, or that if it were in danger, it is the arm of Spain that is to save it. Viewing the matter in this light I cannot but flatter myself, that if the attempt you apprehend should be made it will be rejected with becoming indignation. I am less sanguine as to the issue of the other matter contained in your letter.¹ I know the mutual

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1 The claims of the State against the General Government. See Monroe's letter. *Writings*, i., 135.

prejudices which impede every overture towards a just & final settlement of claims & accts. I persist in the opinion that a proper & speedy adjustment is unattainable from any assembly constituted as Congs is, and acting under the impulse which they must. I need not repeat to you the plan which has always appeared to me most likely to answer the purpose. In the mean time, it is mortifying to see the other States, or rather their Representatives, pursuing a course which will make the case more & more difficult, & putting arms into the hands of the Enemies to every Amendment of our federal system. God knows that they are formidable enough in this State without such an advantage. With it, their triumph will be certain & easy. But I have been led much farther already than I proposed, and will only that

I am with the sincerest affection, your friend & servt.

The inclosed Tickets belong to a very worthy friend who knows not how to obtain a small prize which they have drawn without giving you the trouble of applying for it. He is apprehensive that the door may be already shut agst the demand. If it should not you will kind eno' to call on the proper office and get the proper certificate. There are but 2 of the Tickets I believe which are entitled to prizes, but as they cannot be distinguished here, it must be done by the Register in the office.